

JULY 29, 1976

More saddles are advertised for sale than there are saddles advertised for hire. The ranks of mounted men thin each year. It looks like herders are going to have to raid sewing clubs and beauty shops for roundup crews. Any old boy who can untangle a girt demands a lot of attention and respect nowadays.

Temperament of the men left working on the ranches has changes because of the shortage of help. Last spring, I helped an outfit work that had two regular hands. Trouble was, they refused to work in the same pastures or eat from the same kitchen. Good mornings were handled by curt nods and the adioses were shorter than the 10-4 on a C.B. radio code.

I served as relay man on the job. Somebody had to point out that a trailer tire was flat or an old pony was too tenderfoot to ride.

As the major language was Spanish, I used the sign support method of communication. I'd be worn out before we left the barn, working my hands and my 14 words of Spanish into telling one pouter what the other pouter thought should be the day's work.

After I studied the situation, I suggested to their boss that he might borrow some of our pastures to supplement the 20,000 acres he operates. Big shot personnel men deal in space trauma every office day. You know how cranky people are when they're all crowded up. Elevator riding and water cooler traffic turns into a regular war.

It's been going on for a long time. First white settler in the Shortgrass Country moved 30 miles farther west after a second family moved within six miles of his claim. Partner of mine out in New Mexico sold his entire ranch to avoid the population explosion. Developers subdivided a tract 30 miles to the east of him and an Indian on the reservation to the west built a house so close to his headquarters that he saw the smoke from the chimney every time he walked to the barn. Last I heard, he was pricing ranches in South America. I don't blame him a bit. Folks can be mighty bothersome underfoot all the time.

Though I didn't tell the two mad cowboys, that business of not speaking to one another is grossly misunderstood. School board members become expert in that form of misbehavior. First political fracas I went through on the board, I dreaded going to the Post Office to face the citizens that had forgotten my name. Next time, I realized they were doing me a favor. Sullen electorates, I learned, are far superior to the ones that develop telephonitis after 12 midnight.

You know, not speaking is related to running off from home in that you want to be sure when you run off that somebody is going to care enough to come hunting for you.

I don't have any figures or research on the amount of damage that a person suffers from saying "hello" or "good morning" to his enemy. But I doubt if the strain leaves a permanent scar.

Cowboy hats and boots sell on a bull market. Around the saddle shop, you see plenty of customers. Out in the pastures, however, it's so lonesome that the saddest verse in the song "Home on the Range" is an understatement.

I wasn't asked back to help shear this past spring. My oldest son said the one pasture, one man rule was still in effect. Deals like that are hard to solve. Help is so hard

to get, it'd be difficult to say whether they should be given six-shooters or symbols of peace next Christmas.